

Kapalama Canal project OK'd in final impact review

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A proposed \$80 million city project that plans to turn a canal in Kapalama into a mile-long recreational area has completed its final environmental impact statement.

The project is meant to act as both flood control and a way to revitalize and activate an area that has faced issues with homelessness. It would turn both banks of the Kapalama Canal into a park with a waterfront promenade, green space, bike paths, picnic benches and public art.

It also would connect to a planned rail station.

The canal was built in the 1930s as a means to prevent flooding in the surrounding area. It currently does not have any sidewalks, and was lined with a chain-link fence by the city in 2015 to deter homeless encampments that had become a problem.

Councilwoman Radiant Cordero, who represents the area, said the project is forward-looking and would be an added resource for planned changes that would adjust the now mostly industrial area into a more residential area.

"How can we make it safe and just welcoming for people to come around, and that kind of spurs making parks, making connectivity in that area better," she said.

"That's where this Kapalama Canal Catalytic project is for, it's flood mitigation ... but it's also breathing life into the spaces, kind of revitalizing the area and its utilities and infrastructure there because that's absolutely what is needed."

The area's proximity to the rail station and Honolulu Community College has spurred interest from developers to build more residen-

tial and mixed-use homes.

Notably, a master plan by Kamehameha Schools would produce 4,000 to 5,000 new residential units in the area in early 2026.

According to the final EIS, the project is expected to have a positive impact on the socioeconomic character of the area, would improve the canal's water quality and "catalyze" neighborhood improvements around the Kapalama rail transit station. It is also expected to positively affect local retail businesses.

In the short term, public access to the canal might be affected, although the existing recreational uses of the canal are relatively limited due to it being largely fenced off. People can fish in the canal only off of the bridges.

The project also will include dredging, or removing debris and sediment from the bottom of the canal. However, the final dredged sediment quantities for disposal have not yet been clearly defined.

Flood mitigation has become a main priority for the city, especially following the flooding that happened throughout the island in February. The project is expected to be completed in phases by 2026.

Cordero said the canal project is just one step to making the city a more connected space.

"What this project means beyond the greening and the pedestrian part is connectivity," she said.

"How can we get people from mauka to get down to the rail station on Dillingham? Because right now it's barred by H-1, and people don't want to walk underneath H-1. ... They want safety, and this is what this project will hopefully address."